

## **Hampton Committee Working to Bring Back the Town Clock**

A convergence of circumstances in the late nineteenth century saw the construction of a new Odd Fellows Hall in the center of Hampton and the need for a town clock. When it was learned that the initial funds and the original steeple were both insufficient, a public-spirited local citizen, John T Brown, who'd been raised in Hampton Falls offered to donate to the town a "first class clock with four dials." Each dial was constructed of wood and contained the words "Memorial Gift." The Town donated its \$400 in funds to raise the tower to make it adequate and to buy a bell weighing at least 1200 pounds. In 1898, the work was completed and an agreement was made where the Town would lease the space from the Odd Fellows and maintain the clock and steeple.

For over ninety years thereafter, the clock would keep time and the bell would ring, not only the hours, but for five minutes every night at nine o'clock to signal a curfew when "all respectable children" were to be off the streets and in their homes. The bell also tolled for fifteen minutes morning, noon and night each Washington's birthday, the Fourth of July, and Thanksgiving.

Early in morning of Saturday, January 27, 1990, disaster struck in the form of a fire of undetermined origins, which destroyed the Odd Fellows Hall and severely damaged the clock. Shortly thereafter the clock works, bell and badly damaged faces were salvaged, and delivered by Town Manager, Phil Richards to Glen French, president of the Hampton Area Chamber of Commerce, for safe keeping and possible restoration. A citizens' committee was formed for this purpose, but the efforts failed to gather momentum and the committee dispersed shortly thereafter. Mr. French oversaw the various clock pieces for over a decade before turning them over to the town with the hopes that, with the involvement of the Town government, the project might move forward. The Town kept the pieces for a few more years without interest or progress until local antique dealer Robert Webber offered to take the lead in the clock's restoration. When Mr. Webber passed away, his son Harvey stepped in to take over the work aided by former selectman Cliff Pratt and a citizen's committee Pratt had organized. Hampton's own Ronald Bourgeault has donated a sizable sum to the project to bring back the clock.

Throughout 2010 and 2011, as work on restoring the clock progressed, the committee worked on ideas for appropriate housings for the restored clock and vetted possible locations. From a lengthy list, Centre School has recently been selected as the clock's future home. Currently, plans for the clock's housing are taking shape and the goal is to have the project completed in time for the Town's three hundred seventy-fifth anniversary in 2013.

While that milestone is definitely significant, in general, the most important thing to remember is that we are only temporary custodians of machines that may have already outlived several keepers. It's worth noting that this work is for a clock that has run nearly a million hours. You probably would be hard pressed to find any other machine that continues to serve its masters after such a long period, unless it is another tower clock.